

## The Promise

### SESSION GOALS

Every session has specific goals—things you want your group to walk away knowing, feeling, and committing to do.

**Main Idea:** The Promise of Advent reminds us that God's plans will be fulfilled no matter how unlikely it may seem.

**Head Change:** To accept that God fulfills His promises in a way that highlights His glory and teaches us to rely on Him.

**Heart Change:** To value God's interruptions over our inconveniences.

**Life Change:** To align our purposes with God's purposes.

### OPEN

**What favorite Christmas songs would make it into your holiday playlist? Share what you like about one of those songs. What is one popular Christmas song that will *never* make your playlist?**

The first Advent period preparing for Christ's birth included several songs, which were recorded in Luke 1-2. These songs came from upwelling expressions of those who were touched by the magnificence of God's promises.

Those promises came at odd times and were fulfilled in unexpected ways. God continues to demonstrate His sovereign faithfulness to His children today in surprising ways. When we trust His plan, we can yield to Him and see with joy the way He carries it to completion.

In this session, Jason Turner, pastor of Mississippi Boulevard Church in Memphis, TN, explores the 700-year-old promise of Advent fulfilled in wondrously unexpected obscurity. We are reminded that God continues to work out His plan in unexpected ways through us.

## **READ**

Luke 1:26-38.

## **WATCH**

Before viewing the session, here are a couple important things to look for in Jason Turner's teaching. As you watch, pay attention to how he answers the following questions:

**How might Gabriel's announcement have seemed ill-timed from Mary's perspective?**

**What profound statement does Gabriel make to explain the unlikely events of Elizabeth's conception in old age?**

**Show Session 2:** *The Promise* (12 minutes).

## DISCUSS

Jason Turner explained in this session that God waited seven hundred years to fulfill the promise spoken through Micah. To wait this long suggests God wanted the conditions for the Messiah's arrival to be just right. Much to our surprise, we find that Jesus' parents seem to lack financial security or even a fully stable marital relationship.

**Why do you think God deliberately chose low-income parents and an out-of-wedlock setting for the birth of the Messiah?**

### **GOD'S PROMISES REQUIRE US TO SUBMIT TO HIS DIVINE TIMING.**

Read Luke 1:28-30.

**What positive statements does Gabriel make in these verses to highlight God's blessing on Mary?**

Jason shared the social troubles that Mary would have to endure for carrying the Christ Child to term. These troubles would not have ended at Jesus' birth but likely haunted the family for years. **When have you seen God at work during what seems an inconvenient time in your life?**

When inconvenient circumstances come, people often comment that the problem could not have come at a worse time. God has established that these are the very times when His plan is often unfolding. **How might the knowledge that God is often at work in these situations adjust the way you face them?**

During the session, Jason stated, "When God makes a promise, we have to trust that God is more strategic, and His timing is impeccable." **Share an example of God's impeccable timing at a pivotal point in your life.**

### **GOD'S PROMISES REQUIRE DIVINE EMPOWERMENT TO FULFILL.**

Read Luke 1:31-33.

Gabriel announces four incredible claims about the coming Son. He would be given a divine title (Son of the Most High). He would be given – directly by God – the ancient throne of the lineage of David. The length of His reign would be forever, and the extent of His kingdom would be limitless. All of this was told to a girl who had no

title, power, or authority. She did not even have a husband! The child would be conceived by an act of God.

God’s amazing promises were beyond Mary’s capacity to fulfill. **Why do you think God involves His people in promises that are far too big for people to accomplish?**

Jason notes that our unworthiness and insufficiency are recurring themes in Scripture. **Where in the Bible do you recall God working through the inadequacies of people to fulfill His promises?**

Jason also shared that God’s promises are meant to be carried out with our participation through His power. Christians often get this backward. They operate in their own strength – their power – and hope that God will participate. **What might indicate that a person is working with this misunderstanding of divine empowerment?**

Gabriel stated, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” **Where in your life do you need to remember this promise?**

**GOD’S PROMISES REQUIRE OUR DEFERENCE AND SURRENDER.**

Read Luke 1:37-38.

People who are pressured into a volunteer role often joke about having been “volun-told” to do something. In Mary’s case she was *volun-told* by an angel of the Lord. **When has God called you to yield to His plan?**

In the video session, Jason said, “We should always be willing to surrender to what God has in store.” **Why is such surrender often so difficult?**

**Note:** To consider the responses of other biblical figures to the plans God had for them, go to **Go Deeper Section 1** at the end of this study.

Mary could have peppered her angelic messenger with questions. “Why me?” “What will Joseph or my parents think?” “How am I supposed to raise such a child?” She likely wondered about all these things and more. Instead, she only asked one question, and that was simply about the mechanism of conception. Beyond that, she simply declared, “Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” **What does Mary’s response say about her trust in God?**

**How can too many questions keep us from participating in God’s plans?**

God, of course, is still at work fulfilling His promises, and He does so through His children today. His plans are not always fulfilled through angelic messengers but through the everyday experiences of circumstances and whispers through His indwelling Spirit. **Where can you exhibit a deeper trust in God to do all that He has promised?**

The same Holy Spirit who came upon Mary dwells within the heart of every Christian. **What can you do to stay sensitive to the Spirit’s prompting this Advent season?**

***Note:** To further discuss the ways God speaks to His children, go to **Go Deeper Section 2** at the end of this study.*

**LAST WORD**

God’s plan is always bigger than ours. If Mary had wanted to avoid scrutiny and judgment all her life, she might have asked Gabriel to move on to someone else! Her discomfort led to the fulfillment of centuries-old promises of God in the Person of Jesus Christ. Her role as mother of the Messiah carried not only ostracization and sorrow but also unspeakable joy. She enjoyed a mom’s eye view of God in flesh coming of age and redeeming humanity.

The Advent season reminds each of us that God continues to fulfill His promises to those who are willing to be used by Him. It does not take our power, only our participation. We, too, can experience the joy of seeing God’s hand at work through us to accomplish all He has promised.

## **GO DEEPER**

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The Go Deeper section has two potential functions. It can supplement your small group discussion by providing extra discussion material. We've highlighted a place where each of the following segments could fit in the Discuss section of the study guide.

But you can also use these sections as short devotionals to carry you through the week until your next group meeting.

### **1. Willing Servants**

Read the following passages about other people in Scripture; then answer the questions below:

Exodus 3:1 – 4:17; Judges 4:1-10; 1 Samuel 3:1-21; 2 Chronicles 34:14-21; Galatians 2:11-14

- How did the message receiver initially respond?  
Was there a different response later?
- Were any positive or negative outcomes associated with the response?
- How can Christians today prepare their hearts in advance so that they are ready to obey God's voice?

### **2. The Voice of the Lord**

God is not bound to any one mean of communication. His voice is communicated in various ways. Consider the same passages as above and answer the following questions:

Exodus 3:1 – 4:17; Judges 4:1-10; 1 Samuel 3:1-21; 2 Chronicles 34:14-21; Galatians 2:11-14

- By what means did God communicate His will?
- What other ways does the Bible record God communicating?
- How have you sensed God communicating to you?
- Do you take adequate time to intentionally hear from God?